



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Statement by First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Aliyev

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 17, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aliyev for his update on the pre-electoral period in Kazakhstan. We welcome his assurances that the Government of Kazakhstan intends to cooperate closely with the ODIHR Election Observation Mission and to comply with all of its commitments in accordance with the Copenhagen Document.

The United States is happy to note the significance of the fact that two candidates from the opposition have been registered and are campaigning despite diverse obstacles and intermittent harassment. We also commend the Central Election Commission for the steps it has taken to increase the transparency of its own operations and to address the procedural shortcomings of the 2004 parliamentary elections, including providing for public review of voter lists in advance of election day.

The United States welcomes the Central Election Commission's announcement in early October of a series of steps to improve election procedures, and its more recent announcement that it has forwarded draft legislation to Parliament that would revoke the April 2005 ban on peaceful rallies and public gatherings after the end of the campaign period. This is an important step in support of freedom of speech and assembly, and we urge the Government of Kazakhstan to adopt this draft legislation as soon as possible. The United States hopes the Government of Kazakhstan will undertake to implement the other legislative recommendations made by ODIHR after the 2004 parliamentary elections.

While all five presidential candidates have been able to campaign around the country and have access to the media, we note that there have been several problems with regard to freedom of assembly and freedom of the media. We call on the Government of Kazakhstan and the Central Election Commission to fulfill the letter and spirit of their commitments to ensure equal and unimpeded access to meeting spaces and the media for all candidates. The U.S. notes its concern regarding the seizures of the print runs of independent newspapers and the detention of independent journalists, and underscores the importance of a free and inquiring press to the political development of any country.

Mr. Chairman, the United States fully supports Kazakhstan in its stated goal to abide by its OSCE commitments and to conduct a free and fair election. And may I add that, as a result of my visit two weeks ago to Kazakhstan, I want to state more than ever before, the United States wants nothing but the greatest success for Kazakhstan. This was a visit that completely knocked my socks off.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.